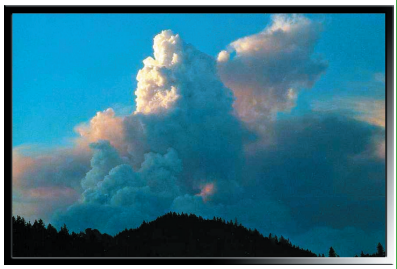
Timbered Rock Information Sheet

What happened in the Elk Creek Watershed?



The Elk Creek Watershed has had an active fire history.

The 2002 Timbered Rock Fire burned nearly 27,000 acres of land within the Elk Creek Watershed. About 12,000 acres of that land lies within a federally-designated Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). LSRs were designated through the Northwest Forest Plan in 1994 in order to "protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems which serve as habitat for late-successional and old-growth related species including the northern spotted owl." Because such a large area of the LSR burned, the fire provided an opportunity for the BLM to look at late-successional forest enhancement and protection needs. The Timbered Rock Fire also provided a chance to evaluate the possibility for economic recovery of the trees killed in the fire.

The Timbered Rock Fire altered the seral stages within the Elk Creek Watershed. Seral stages are the series of plant communities that develop during the ecological progression from bare ground to the climax, or final, stage of succession. About 2,234 acres of BLM-administered land shifted from mid- and late seral stages back to early seral. No matter what action is taken on these lands...whether or not salvage occurs, restoration actions are undertaken, or reforestation happens...these lands have been set back to an early seral stage.

The Timbered Rock Fire created extensive areas of dead and dying trees.

How did the BLM decide what actions to take?

Throughout the preparation of the environmental impact statement (EIS) for this project, public involvement was sought during several stages in the process. Comments from the public and coordination with other agencies helped identify issues and concerns. These issues were used to prepare seven alternative ways of addressing salvage and restoration within the Elk Creek Watershed. BLM specialists analyzed what impacts these alternatives might have on the resources present in the watershed. Specialists looked at impacts to soils, hydrology, fisheries, vegetation, special habitats, special status plants, noxious weeds, grazing, fire and fuels, air quality, wildlife, roads, cultural resources, public safety, economics, and environmental justice. The alternatives and their impacts were presented to the public in the Draft EIS.

Public meetings allowed the BLM to provide the public with an understanding of the proposed actions.

Comments on the Draft EIS were used to shape the Final EIS. The Final EIS, and public review of that document, provided the decision makers, the Medford District Manager and the Butte Falls Field Manager, with the information needed to make the final decision.

With the signing of the Record of Decision for the Timbered Rock Fire Salvage and Elk Creek Watershed Restoration project, the BLM has identified which alternative management actions to implement. Following is a summary of future management actions to be taken.

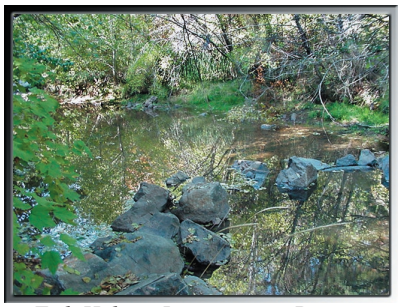
Timbered Rock Information Sheet

Restoration projects

Since 1994, management of the BLM-administered lands within the Elk Creek LSR concentrated on restoration projects designed to protect or accelerate late-successional habitat or improve threatened or endangered species habitat. The EIS analyzed actions designed to move resource conditions within the LSR closer to the desired future conditions identified in the Northwest Forest Plan, Elk Creek Watershed Analysis, and South Cascades LSR Assessment. Restoration projects will be located within the Timbered Rock Fire perimeter as well as throughout the Elk Creek Watershed.

Late-Successional Habitat Restoration, Pine Release, and Riparian Reserve Thinning projects are designed to promote late-successional conditions in forest stands. Thinning and pine release will occur on about 2,500 acres. Roughly half that (1,240 acres) will yield commercial products.

Riparian Reserve Thinning



Fish Habitat Improvement Project

Fish Habitat Improvement projects will improve habitat and passage for salmon and trout. The replacement of four culverts will open up 5 additional miles of spawning habitat within the watershed. The placement of rock weirs and logs along 8 miles of streams will help collect gravels needed for spawning and create pools for raising young.

Fuel Management Zones (FMZ) will assist in future wildfire suppression activities, provide areas for fire-fighter safety, and provide anchor points for control lines. FMZs are intended to reduce the potential size of future fires and the devastating effects those large fires have on late-successional habitat.

Fuel Management Zone

Road Project

Road projects are designed to minimize road-related erosion and sedimentation and protect water quality. Road projects will include reconstruction, maintenance, decommissioning, and seasonal road closures. Projects will reduce the road density in the watershed, reduce damage to road surfaces during the wet season, protect fish species from surface road erosion, and reduce the risk of road failure.

Other restoration projects will improve wildlife habitat by providing sites for animals to den, hide, rest, and forage. Two areas will be treated to promote the growth of large trees with the characteristics desired by bald eagles for nesting sites.

What's been done so far?

Immediately after the Timbered Rock Fire was controlled, rehabilitation and restoration activities began in the fire area. A variety of rehabilitation projects have already been completed under the Timbered Rock Emergency Stabilization/ Rehabilitation Plan:

- 7 miles of road were rocked
- an old log stringer bridge was removed
- 1 pump chance was cleaned and rehabilitated
- 2 miles of road were decommissioned
- 3 culverts were removed
- about 20 miles of fire control lines were waterbarred and seeded
- 1,400 acres were replanted

Timbered Rock Information Sheet

How much wood will be salvaged?

A total of 23.4 MMBF (million board feet) of wood will be salvaged.

What exactly does that mean?

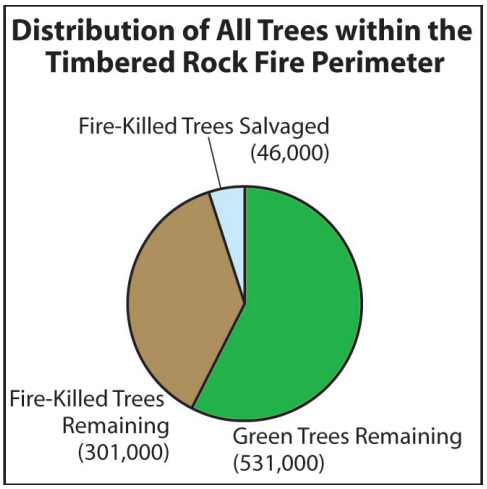
Think of it this way...a 2,000 square foot, single family home requires about 16,000 board feet of lumber for construction. The amount of wood salvaged in the Timbered Rock Fire would provide enough lumber to construct 1,462 homes.

Are there other benefits?

This 23.4 MMBF of salvage would also result in $4.8 million to the Federal Treasury. Salvage would provide an additional 354 jobs and would bring $20.1 million to the local economy.

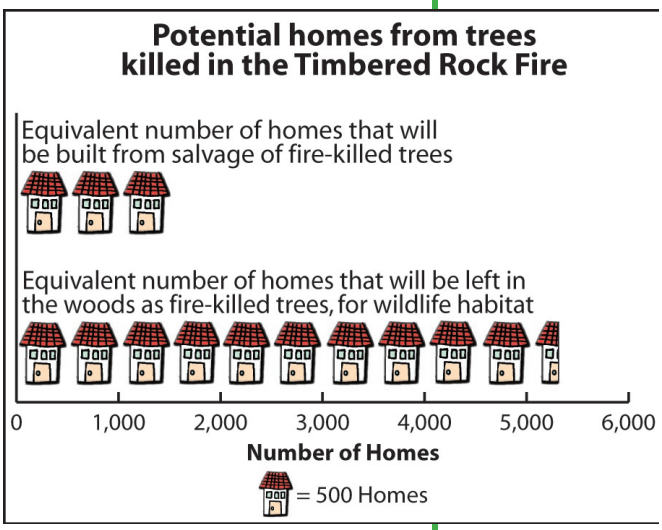
Salvage

The Northwest Forest Plan direction for managing LSRs provides guidance on salvage of fire-killed trees. Salvage logging will take place on BLM-administered lands within the Timbered Rock Fire perimeter, primarily in selected areas of high and moderate burn severity and along roads where hazardous trees are present. A total of 957 acres of fire-killed trees (nearly 23.4 million board feet) are identified for salvage.



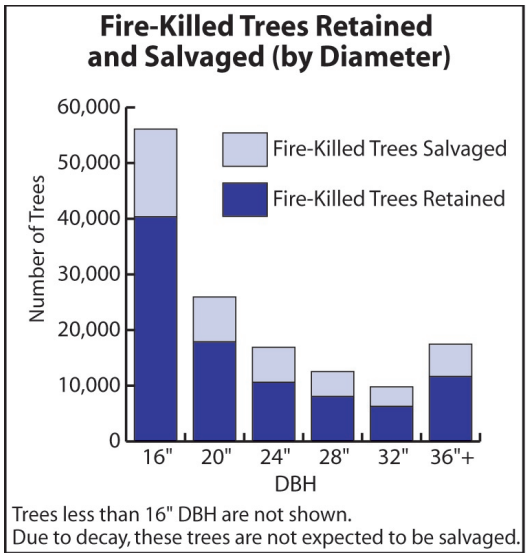
Area Salvage

Of the 9,762 acres of trees killed in the Timbered Rock Fire, area salvage will occur in small patch cuts on 679 acres. No salvage will occur in riparian areas.

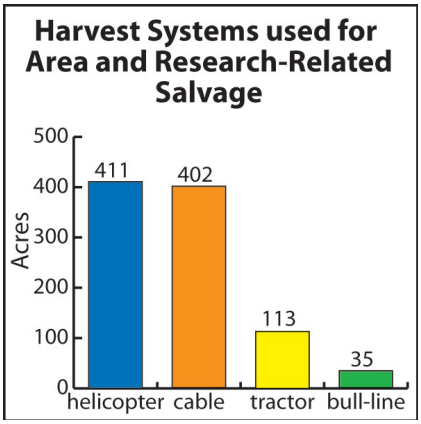


Salvage will generally occur in high and moderate burn severity areas greater than 10 acres in size with less than 40 percent canopy cover.

No new permanent roads will be constructed, although less than 1 mile of temporary road will be needed to access harvest units.



An average of 8-10 snags per acre will be left, except in research units. Remaining snags will be concentrated in pockets outside of harvest units.



Salvage of Roadside Hazard Trees

Salvage will remove between 1,000 and 1,200 hazardous trees along BLM-administered roads within a 200' strip above and below existing open roads or roads needed on a temporary basis. Only trees determined to be a threat or a potential threat to the public will be salvaged. Not all trees within the 200' strip are hazards, so not all fire-killed trees will be salvaged. If a hazard tree is located in a riparian area or within ¼ mile of an active owl site, it will be cut and left on-site.

Timbered Rock Information Sheet

Research

Scientists from Oregon State University and the Pacific Northwest Research Station, in cooperation with the BLM, will be conducting research on lands burned in the Timbered Rock Fire. Research will look at impacts from post-fire salvage logging on birds and small mammals and will investigate reforestation after a fire.

Wildlife Research

This research will focus on the effects of post-fire salvage and salvage intensity on wildlife species. Research will take place in 12, 30-acre or greater units within the Timbered Rock Fire area and will look at three levels of salvage activity:

No salvage will occur in the 4 control units.

Moderate salvage will occur in 4 units. No salvage will be done in 30% of each unit. In the other 70% of the unit, 6 trees per acre greater than 20" DBH will remain and will be scattered throughout the units.

Heavy salvage will occur in 4 units. Salvage will be done in 100% of the units. Six trees per acre greater than 20" DBH will remain and will be scattered throughout the units.

Reforestation Research

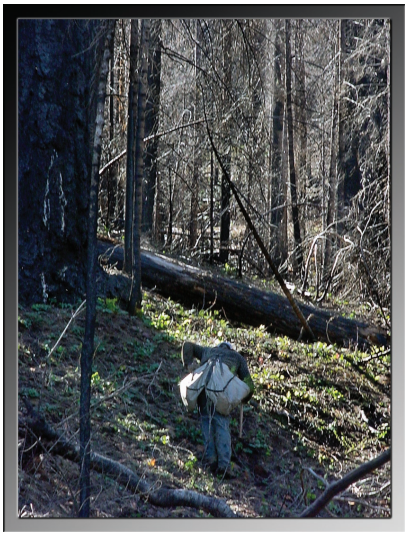
This research will look at the impacts of salvage, post-fire replanting, and brush removal on reforestation.

Research will look at varying reforestation treatments:

- no planting and no brush removal;
- planting Douglas-fir only and removing competing brush;
- high density, mixed species planting and removal of competing brush in some plots but not in others; and
- low density, mixed species planting and removal of competing brush in some plots, but not others.

Reforestation

Areas burned at high or moderate severity will be planted with the tree species that existed in those areas before the fire. Reforestation was completed on 1,400 acres after the fire, under the Emergency Stabilization/ Rehabilitation Plan. Another 3,600 acres will be replanted. Reforestation will be completed by the spring of 2004.



Tree Planting